



News Release

**Office of the Louisiana State Fire Marshal
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VISIT OUR WEBSITE: "www.dps.state.la.us/sfm/"

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FIRE MARSHAL ANNOUNCES "BUILDING DEDICATION/ 100 YEARS OF SERVICE"

State Fire Marshal V.J. Bella, announced today plans for the "Building dedication and centennial celebration". The celebration will include the dedication of its new building at 8181 Independence Boulevard and honor the 100th year of the agency's existence. Most people in America have a lifelong dream of owning a home. Now, the Office of the State Fire Marshal finally has its own "home". In January, 2004, the Fire Marshal's Office, for the first time ever, occupied its own building. This comes at the completion of a five year project. The two-story, 36,000 sq. ft. building houses all Fire Marshal operations under one roof: Administration, Plan Review, Inspections (including the Baton Rouge District and Health Care section), Licensing, Mechanical Safety, and Arson. The Fire Marshal's District Offices continue to serve the public in the New Orleans, Lafayette, Shreveport, and Monroe areas. The building was designed by the firm of Washer, Hill & Lipscomb Architectural Corporation of Baton Rouge and constructed by M.D. Descant Inc. of Bunkie, Louisiana.

The office of the State Fire Marshal has a rich history. Recorded history of fires in Louisiana has its roots in New Orleans as early as 1788. This was the year of a major fire that destroyed most of the French Quarter. On March 21st, a fire began at the home of Don Jose Nunez when an altar candle ignited lace curtains. The fire quickly spread, due to the gale force winds on that day, and had soon consumed the entire house. As the day was Good Friday, the bells of St. Louis Cathedral did not ring to warn citizens of the emergency. In five hours the fire had burned itself out and taken with it most of the city. In all, the fire had destroyed 850 buildings. The city's two fire engines were operational but they were consumed by the flames of the fire. Most of the city was rebuilt by 1791; however, the fire had destroyed many of the primitive structures of the city. These were replaced with courtyards, thick walls and arcades to protect them from the heat of any such future blaze. Much of the French Quarter as it is seen today is a result of the rebuilding after this major fire and the initial fire legislation enacted soon afterwards. In 1884, Act 109 was codified to protect firemen, and required that at least one window on every floor of a building be equipped with an apparatus to enable it to be opened from the outside. This was subsequent to the formation of the Volunteer Fire Department of the City of New Orleans, which was established in 1829. In 1888, an act was passed to require ladders or fire escapes on buildings higher than four stories. Acts such as these were just the beginning attempts to improve fire protection in Louisiana.

In 1904 an important step was taken in the advancement of fire protection. Act #122 created the Office of the Fire Marshal for the state of Louisiana, and procedures were put into place to maintain the office. The Fire Marshal's office was given certain powers and duties to enable the enhancement of fire protection, most of which are the same as the powers that are given today to the Fire Marshal. The office of the Fire Marshal was first recognized in the Louisiana Constitution in 1913 and was re-established in Act 24 of 1914. The 1914 Act made the office a constitutionally created entity.

The mission statement of the Fire Marshal's Office signifies its existence: "To protect life and property from the hazards of fire or explosion, to ensure the safety of our citizens in the constructed environment, to provide equal access to disabled individuals and promote the efficient use of energy in commercial buildings." Many guests are invited to the Celebration including the Governor and Louisiana's elected officials, but our most important guests will be our partners in the fire service

and the citizens of Louisiana for which we serve. This event would not be happening without the vision and dedication of State Fire Marshal V.J. Bella.

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